

would have failed the simplest of exam questions about it.' One wonders at the end whether in this encounter Moody has failed as an academic, but succeeded as a teacher. His piece alone is sufficient reason for looking at this book.

University of St Andrews

ROBERT CRAWFORD

'The Men of 1914': T. S. Eliot and Early Modernism. By ERIK SVARNY. Pp. xii+268. Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1988. £30 net.

Dr Svarny takes as his theme T. S. Eliot's development between 1914 and 1922, examining the consistency of his oppositional stance in these years with those of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis. His wider aim is 'to write a comparative, historical study which would locate the social intentionality of a body of poetry notoriously resistant to any discussion of "meanings"', asserting that this methodological approach constitutes the principal originality of his book.

The expectations aroused by this claim remain, I feel, largely unfulfilled. Dr Svarny gestures on several occasions towards the New Historicism but his study lacks the detailed historical foundations that a materialist critique presupposes. As a result, despite his attack on the New Critics, his criticism fails to satisfy his own requirement of 'locating history *within* the text, in the meanings and forms it offers and allows'. Despite the fact that his monograph deals expressly with an oppositional artistic constellation, he offers no developed theory of the avant-garde but instead reiterates stale generalizations about the alienated post-Romantic artist. His account of the intellectual context of *Blast*, although a competent digest, adds nothing to the many studies of the Vorticist group published during the last fifteen years, of several of which he appears ignorant. There are comparable omissions in his treatment of Pound, notably in his discussion of 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley', where his argument that source-hunting can explicate 'Mauberley' by contrast with the elusiveness of Eliot's poems of the same period leads him to oversimplify the shifting perspectives that recent critics of this poem have explored. The considerable strengths of Dr Svarny's study accordingly do not lie in its theoretical framework nor its historical materialism but rather in its application to Eliot of the kind of stylistically orientated commentary that he avowedly rejects.

The leitmotiv of Dr Svarny's argument is Eliot's developing attitudes to and eventual construction of a 'tradition', which he persuasively connects with Eliot's interpretation of Bradley's philosophy. Eliot's scepticism noted the fissure between the relativism that Bradley's concept of a disjunct plurality of 'finite centres' should imply and his wish-fulfilling hypothesis of an Absolute that would draw these isolated subjective consciousnesses into an ideal unity. In this oscillation between the subjectivism of multiple, centrifugal points of view and the desired coherence that a transcendent Absolute would provide, Svarny sees a parallel with Eliot's own intellectual ambivalence. He traces this in the formal tensions between post-Romantic lyricism and impersonality, fragmentation, and generic structure in Eliot's poetry up to and including *The Waste Land*. Eliot's sceptical idealism is likewise seen to motivate his frustrated aspiration towards the intellectual order promised by the 'mythical method' and by the evocation of a cultural 'tradition' that would later modulate into Eliot's pursuit of a religious and political Authority to curb the excesses of individualism in a civil rather than merely literary context. In Dr Svarny's view Eliot's greatest work depended on this tension between the rage for order and an engagement with social and cultural disintegration, a tension that was lost in his later complacent recourse to Christian orthodoxy, where order was achieved only by neglecting temporal realities.

The originality of Dr Svarny's study lies in his interweaving of this analytical

framework with sensitive textual commentaries. He writes particularly well on the quatrain poems and on 'Gerontion' and there is an excellent chapter comparing Eliot's attitudes to satire with those of Lewis. In discussing Eliot's debts to Laforgue and Gautier, Svarny demonstrates lucidly and in helpful detail the parallel use of stylistic devices, although in seeking to clarify Eliot's progression beyond his poetic models he underestimates the complexity both of Laforgue's mature style and of the nineteenth-century dramatic monologue, which was considerably subtler than he allows. He writes suggestively on the cruelty and ethical dubiety of laughter in Eliot's early poetry and on Eliot's ambivalence towards what Sweeney represents. It is in such intelligent observations that the student of Eliot's early work will learn much from Dr Svarny's meticulous study.

University of St Gall

ALAN ROBINSON

Postmodern Brecht: A Re-Presentation By ELIZABETH WRIGHT. Pp. xii+154 (Critics of the Twentieth Century). London and New York: Routledge, 1988. Cloth, £25; paper, £8.95 net.

Nowhere in the book does the author indicate the magnitude of the paradox encapsulated in her title. In a recent article concerned with post-modernism as an architectural phenomenon, Philip Cooke has characterized it thus:

Postmodernism, as a depthless, aesthetically populist but conspicuously over-consumptionist cultural form, parallels in the built environment of cities a new stage of rentier-led over-accumulation based on third-world debt, military outlays and capitalist flight to monetarist havens . . . The experience of postmodernity is of vastly inflated incomes and inherited wealth for a privileged few capable of creating their own environments of overconsumption and of an enforced redivision of labour . . . as capitalism retrenches to its more dynamic redoubts in international finance, property, high technology and military production.

In other cultural forms, too, the 'post' is increasingly being perceived as an anti-progressive cultural manifestation of late capitalism. Dick Hebdige: 'knowledge is assembled [in the literary organs of the "post"] and dispensed to the public by a motley gang of bricoleurs, ironists, designers, publicists, image consultants, *hommes et femmes fatales*, market researchers, pirates, adventurers, *flâneurs* and dandies.'

Since this Swiftian catalogue reads like a list of Brecht's pet hates, how is it possible to 'co-opt' (her word) him to post-modernism? The answer given by Elizabeth Wright is to ignore most of the above (she does cite Jameson and Eagleton as token opponents) and to set up as a straw man a three-stage progressive model of Brecht's career in which the early plays give place to an 'epic' phase and finally to the 'dialectical' phase of the mature political plays, and then to displace this in favour of the early plays, *Baal* and *In the Jungle of the Cities*, that can plausibly be described as 'postmodern'. In these plays, with the help of a little Lacan, one can observe Brecht 'probing the constitution of the subject at the intersection of social (historical) and psychological (transhistorical) forces' (p. 97). And with the help of Lyotard who likes the 'post' and who says that 'a work can become modern only if it is first postmodern', we can get rid of chronology altogether and avoid tying the post-modern to regrettable economic and cultural developments like depthlessness, ahistoricity, avoidance of ethical judgement, irresponsibility, and so on.

That is *how* the argument is made. The question now is *why* anyone would wish to make it. The answer is that construed thus Brecht can be said to have enabled the work of post-modern practitioners like Pina Bausch, Robert Wilson, and Heiner